



GUIDELINES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES USING GENERATIVE AI



TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Overview	-----	2
• Links to existing statements of principle	-----	3
• Transparency	-----	3
• Human oversight	-----	3
• Allowed and prohibited uses	-----	4
• Privacy and confidentiality	-----	4
• Algorithmic bias	-----	4
• Training and literacy	-----	4
• Cooperation and dependency	-----	4
• Enforcement		
• Tailoring to fit different organisations	----- -----	5 5
• A Proactive and Adaptive Approach	-----	5

OVERVIEW

Generative artificial intelligence systems are being used by actors across the world to create and share information.

The media sector, in particular, has been at the forefront of adoption, as AI systems are augmenting all stages of the news production cycle – newsgathering, news production, and news distribution.⁽¹⁾ Major media organisations and associations have been publishing statements to explain both their general approach to generative AI, and the specific principles that will guide their usage of the technology.

Examples include:

- [Associated Press](#) – ‘Standards around generative AI’
- [Thomson Reuters](#) – ‘Data and AI ethics principles’
- [BBC](#) – ‘Generative AI at the BBC’
- [Financial Times](#) – ‘Letter from the editor on generative AI and the FT’ (paywalled)
- [The Guardian](#) – ‘The Guardian’s approach to generative AI’
- [The South African Press Council](#) – ‘A brief for journalists on Artificial Intelligence’

Academics and other researchers have begun identifying common themes from these statements of principles, which – although drawing primarily from examples in the Global North – offer useful insights.⁽²³⁾ It emerges from this research that:



*“Publishers across national media systems and organisational categories respond to the rise of AI in **broadly similar ways**. However, there are indications that **national idiosyncrasies and organisational categories continue to matter** as important moderating factors. **Funding models**, in particular, seem to lead to different priorities, with commercial publishers often more detailed and with a stronger focus on allowed and prohibited uses as well as data protection.”*

1. See for example Charlie Beckett and Mira Yaseen 'Generating change: a global survey of what news organisations are doing with AI' (2023) *Polis Journalism at LSE* (accessible [here](#)).

2. NiemanLab, 'Writing guidelines for the role of AI in your newsroom? Here are some, er, guidelines for that' (2023) (accessible [here](#)).

3. Oxford Internet Institute, 'Policies in Parallel? A Comparative Study of Journalistic AI Policies in 52 Global News Organisations' (2023) (accessible [here](#)).

4. Id. at page 3.

While this analysis addresses media organisations, many of the key principles and considerations are also highly relevant for political parties who may be considering using generative AI systems in their public communications and other operations. **In the interest of maximising trust and credibility, political parties should therefore consider adopting their own statements of principle detailing how they will use AI systems in their political communications.**

Accordingly, this document outlines the core principles that political parties in South Africa should address in drafting their own statements of principles. and provides further guidance on how political parties can tailor these principles to their specific needs. It closes by considering some open questions on the function of these guidelines for the future.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1 LINKS TO EXISTING JOURNALISTIC PRINCIPLES

Political parties should consider linking any AI policy they develop to their pre-existing principles, manifestos, or other public documents that guide their operation and direction. This is important in embedding the AI policy within a broader organisational culture. For instance, a party's AI policy could be linked to its overarching values statement, its campaign platform promises around technology and innovation, or its existing data privacy and security commitments.

2 TRANSPARENCY

Almost all existing guidelines emphasise the importance of transparency on the part of organisations in how they make use of AI. However, many are vague on exactly how this transparency should be communicated – for example, whether a single statement noting that the organisation makes use of AI is sufficient, or whether it is necessary to disclose in each article or piece of content how and which AI has been used.

In the interest of fostering public trust, this latter practice of disclosing as much detail on the use of AI by political parties is advisable – including where AI is used to generate or narrate content. Moreover, parties should strive to be transparent about their use of AI in internal processes that may impact constituents or democratic functions, such as candidate selection, policy development, or voter outreach strategies

3 HUMAN OVERSIGHT

Most guidelines also reference the need for human oversight where AI systems are used. This is indeed vital for maintaining accuracy and public trust. Political parties should specify exactly who within them is responsible for overseeing the different AI systems being used.

4 ALLOWED AND PROHIBITED USES

Several guidelines explicitly flag in which instances they will and will not use AI systems. This level of detail is valuable – where the boundaries of acceptable use lie ought to be determined by individual organisations, in line with their broader values and cultures. Political parties should enumerate exactly what they do and do not use AI for, to foster greater trust. Parties should commit to not using AI to create or propagate mis- and disinformation, deepfakes, and to other content designed to subvert democratic processes. Moreover, political parties should be guided by the principle of do no harm when using AI, and in doing so commit to ensuring that any uses of AI do not reasonably and foreseeably cause any harm.

Particular attention ought to be paid to the question of how AI will be deployed in elections – political parties ought to commit to not using the technology in ways that undermine trust in the democratic process.

5 PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

It is often recognised that, in using AI systems, organisations must be careful with providing sensitive information to third-party platforms that operate AI systems, in order to ensure that sources are adequately protected.

6 ALGORITHMIC BIAS

Given the well-established challenges of AI systems reproducing biases latent in their data sets, and the fact that the most advanced of these AI systems are currently being developed by companies in the Global North, many guidelines single out the importance of taking specific steps to guard against algorithmic bias in AI-generated content. This can be thought of as a subset of the broader need for human oversight of these systems. As part of efforts to counter algorithmic bias, consideration should be given to training or making use of AI systems that have been fine-tuned on local contexts, and which can parse local languages.

7 TRAINING AND LITERACY

To make the most of this technology, and to understand how to use it responsibly, it is useful for political parties to explicitly plan for how they can educate their members (particularly those in charge of public communications) on how to best make use of AI systems in the course of their work.

8 COOPERATION AND DEPENDENCY

Most political parties that make use of AI systems have not developed them in-house, and so are implicitly collaborating with external parties by making use of their systems. The terms of such collaborations ought to be clarified for the public. Given that reliance on third party systems can create dependence on those systems, plans should be made for how such dependencies will be managed. Where there is capacity, political parties should also explore how they might develop or customise systems over which they can have more control.

9 ENFORCEMENT

When crafting statements of principle on the use of AI systems, political parties should give thought to what consequences may arise from their non-compliance with their own codes of principle, what steps they may take to rectify this non-compliance, and how else these statements of principle can be enforced.

TAILORING TO FIT DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS

It emerges from the above that while there is consensus on the broad principles of relevance to regulating the use of AI, many specific details ought to be determined by individual political parties, as they see fit. These include:

- **The appropriate level and form of transparency in disclosing the use of AI.**
- **The institutional structures that embed human oversight over AI systems.**
- **The form that training and literacy programs might take.**
- **An organisation's approach to managing the dependencies attendant to making use of AI technology.**
- **The mechanisms by which any set of guidelines will be enforced.**

To address these specifics, political parties should establish a diverse group of relevant stakeholders – including party leadership, communications staff, technology experts, and representatives from key constituent groups. They should take a customised approach, identifying which AI risks and challenges are most relevant to their particular context and the communities they serve.

Parties should also consider making their AI guidelines public and collaborating with other parties to establish shared standards and accountability measures. As part of the development process, they should also consider engaging in public consultation, for example by holding town halls or soliciting feedback from constituents, to ensure their AI guidelines reflect the priorities, values, and concerns of the communities they serve. These steps can help demonstrate their commitment to using AI ethically and responsibly in service of the democratic process.

In the best case, AI guidelines can be a meaningful form of self-regulation, supporting political parties in engaging with constituents and the public transparently and equitably. However, parties must commit to upholding their principles in practice, not just paying lip service to responsible AI use. By developing robust, context-specific guidelines and enforcement mechanisms, parties can promote healthier political discourse and rebuild trust in the era of AI.

PROACTIVE AND ADAPTIVE APPROACH

As AI systems become more advanced, they may automate and augment various aspects of political party operations beyond content generation, such as constituent engagement and policy drafting. Political parties should be proactive in preparing for these possibilities, for example by:

- Forming advisory groups with diverse experts to provide guidance on emerging AI threats, opportunities, and best practices.
- Engaging with policymakers, academics, and civil society to contribute to the development of responsible AI governance frameworks.
- Regularly reviewing and updating their AI guidelines to keep pace with technological advancements and ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness.
- Conducting audits and impact assessments to understand the effects of AI use on constituents and democratic processes.

By adopting a proactive and adaptive approach to AI governance, parties can harness the benefits of these technologies while mitigating their risks. AI guidelines can only be impactful, however, where there is a genuine commitment to ethical principles, continuous learning, and public accountability. As AI becomes more integrated into democratic processes, transparent and robust guidelines will be essential for maintaining the integrity and credibility of political parties.

